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A
S E R M O N

Preach'd in the

City of York,

On *Wednesday*, *January* XIX, 170³₄.

BEING THE

F A S T D A Y.

A P P O I N T E D

For the late Dreadful S T O R M

By T. C. *K*

L O N D O N,

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A
SERMON

Preach'd upon

FAST-DAY.

On Wednesday, Jan. 19, 1703.

II Sam. xxiv. 14.

And David said unto God, I am in a great strait, let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, (for his mercies are great) and let me not fall into the hands of men.

TH O' King David's Sin of numbering the People was slowly finish'd, yet it was no sooner finish'd but it brought forth Death. After it had travel'd thro' the Nation nine Months and twenty Days, v. 8. it teem'd with a National Judgment. His Pride, but not his Numbers were

swell'd by his Ostentation. To be only greater in Opinion, he offended his God, and diminished his People.

BUT as his Satisfaction was but imaginary, so it was but short-liv'd; for if he regal'd himself at *Supper* with the many valiant Thousands, the next Morning he was made to *Break-fast* on a view of dead Corps. If a stroke upon the Royal Conscience had not (as some think) broke his Nights rest, he was saluted early the next Day with a Messenger of Death, v. 11. for the large *Muste-roll* which *Joab* had presented him with the Night before, he had the next Morning a *Dead-warrant* sent him from God with three Columns in't, *To the Famine, to the Sword, to the Pestilence*, and with positive Orders to write himself and his People under one of them, v. 13.

THE Text gives us an account how this great Man receiv'd this direful Message; he did not storm at his Domestick *Seer*, but submitted to the Divine Authority, which *Gad* durst not counterfeit, and himself could not resist. *And David said unto Gad, &c.* This was his solemn Answer, which he humbly return'd to the Arbiter of Life and Death; wherein we may observe,

David's Distress, I am in a strait, that there was no way to escape the threatened Effects of God's Anger; that all his humble Prostrations, his melting Confessions, his earnest Penitential Cries, v. 10. could not avert deserved Judgments. Such dismal Tidings from Heaven must fill his pious Soul with Anguish, that an irrevocable Decree was now pass'd for a general Slaughter, that he cou'd turn no way, but see Death before him; for he was Arrested with three *Proposals*, every one of which had a Death's-head stamp'd upon it.

HE who knew both God and Man so well, could not be at a loss which to choose; but that Death must be his choice, that no less Punishment than Destruction was determin'd, that the dire Sentence could neither be revok'd, nor mitigated, that Justice now disdain'd the Sacrifice of *Beasts*, and demanded *Men of Valour* for Victims, that he must now discount so many

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ny Thousands in the *Martial-list*, and read their great Names in the *Bill of Mortality*; that he who had so often expos'd his own Life for his Subjects, should thus contribute to Sin theirs away; *these things* greatly distress'd him.

HIS Determination. *Let us now fall into the Hand of the Lord.* As a Judge God was resolv'd to scourge Israel, but as a gracious Father he gave David leave to chuse the Rod. He did not refer it to David, whether he should punish with Death or no. We are apt to be partial in our own Case, and to regard our own Safety more than God's Honour; but he graciously condescended to give him the choice of one of three Deaths; for Men are usually more easie under their own Election.

BUT this Wise and humble Prince chose so, as to leave room for Resignation to the Divine Will. He expressly deprecates the Hand of Man, but his desire to fall into God's Hand is more generally exprest, and implies, he would resign himself and his People to God's Disposal, which of the other two he saw fittest to inflict, an extraordinary Example of Modesty and Resignedness under the Apprehensions of crying Guilt, and irrevocable Judgments. This Royal Example I shall endeavour to make useful to us in this one Proposition.

THAT when the Sins of a Nation call for Judgments, 'tis then more eligible to fall into the Hand of God, than into the Hand of Man.

WHEN Matters come to such a fatal Crisis, is a Question too nice for me to meddle with; the All-wise Governour of the World knows best what are the just Measures of his Patience and Forbearance towards a sinful People.

WE may think it honourable for God to strike, when 'tis more for his Honour to forbear. The Prophet *Jonah* would have contracted God's Long-suffering to forty Days, and thought it disparaging to his Message, if he extended his Mercy to *Nineveh* beyond that short Term, *cap. 4. 1.* The three Disciples thought it fit to revenge the Affront done their Ma-

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ster by Fire from Heaven; they would have made short work in the World, if the Spirit had not descended to quench this strange Fire, and to kindle kinder Flames in their Breasts.

O N the other hand, we may think, it would commend God's Patience and Goodness, if he did protract his Favours: When to do so, would reproach his Government, embolden Sinners to question his Being or Providence, or give them wrong Notions of his glorious Attributes. He only knows when to stop the Current of his Favours, and when to open the Sluces of his Judgments, that he may stem a Torrent of Wickedness, and preserve some Religious Fear of him in the World. Besides God's Comminations being Conditional, do give way to a happy Disappointment by the timely Reformation of Sinners.

T I S enough that we know that every Sin deserves his Wrath; that when he comes out of his Place to punish us, he can appeal to our selves for his own Vindication. *Thy ways and thy doings have procur'd these things unto thee, this is thy wickedness,* Jer. 4. 18. And when we know that Iniquity is bold and spreading, that Christian Piety is under a general Decay; that a long Train of favourable Dispensations have not led us to God, that lesser Calamities have left us unreform'd, that Divine Warnings are made the publick Theme of Derision, we know enough, that may make us cry out with *David, My flesh trembles for fear of thee, I am afraid of thy judgments,* Ps. 119. 120.

N O R need I stay to prove that it was not only for a Personal Offence that God punish'd the Land, but *Israel* had sinned, and *Israel* must bleed for it. For it is plain from v. 1. That before *David* had committed this particular Transgression, *the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.* Tho' the generality was not necessary to the numbring of the People, yet they had some way or other contributed to pull down Vengeance on them. Therefore to open my way to Application, I shall shew,

I. W H A T

I. **WHAT** we are to understand by falling into the Hand of God.

II. **THAT** the stormy Winds are the Hand of God.

III. Why it is more Eligible to fall into the Hand of God, than into the Hand of Man.

I. What we are, &c. All Afflictions may be exprest by that Phrase, whatever be the Rod, it is in our Heavenly Father's Hand; whoever be the Instruments, or Means, they are his Fatherly Corrections. We should not despise them as undesigned Accidents; we have somewhat more to do with them, than only to bear them as well as we can. They are his Message to us, and deserve our awful Consideration.

BUT we are not here to understand those common Evils that are every Day the Exercise of some good Christian or other. The Text intends more extraordinary Judgments of God, wherein Man is no Instrument. For the Opposition is not between God and any other Creatures, but between God and Man. The Hand of God, and the Hand of Man seem to be only opposed here. True, Man may be the Hand of God, as well as other Creatures; but here *David* Deprecates the Calamity, wherein Man was to be an Agent, Contriver, or Inflicter. And thus Famine was the immediate Hand of God † as well as the Pestilence. This latter was executed by the Hand of an Angel, as the other is usually produced by drought, by the Caterpillar, &c. † Vide Bp. Patrick in Loc.

BUT that which this Holy Man desir'd, was, that Man might not be Actor in this Punishment, who would have Designs of his own to Prosecute, contrary to God's, who would have his own Passions to gratifie, and his own Cause to stickle for, without any Respect to God's Glory, or the good of suffering Delinquents. It is then, as if *David* had said, Lord, do with us what thou pleasest, so our Enemies may not have their Wills on us; we dare not trust our selves in Man's Hand, but we humbly commit our selves into thine, acknowledging thy Justice, and imploring thy Mercy; O let not wicked Men have

have the managing of this severe Chastisement, which our Luxury, our Pride, and our Carnal Confidence have made so necessary.

II. I come to shew that the stormy Winds are the immediate Hand of God, these have no Designs, but his to accomplish, no Quarrel of their own to vindicate, no Cause but their Creators to plead.

It is enough for my purpose that they are not the Hand of Man; tho' rais'd by Angels, yet they are the Hand of God, as the Pestilence was, v. 16. And when the Angel stretch'd out his Hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, &c. They are not the Effects of † Chance. He serves himself of all his Creatures, and when most unruly, they most need his Guidance.

† God never left second Causes to struggle and operate in a Vagabond way. Charnock on Prov.

NOR were second Causes so chain'd together by an inflexible Fate, that the Storm could not have been diverted, if our Sins had not deserv'd it, &c. Tho' the Establish'd Laws of Nature are the Circle of his ordinary Providence, yet He that rideth upon the Heaven, can slacken, or accelerate his Chariot-wheels, can give such a Check, or such an Impetus to Natural Causes, as may serve the Design of some extraordinary Appearance of the Divine Majesty. It has been the common Sense of Mankind, that besides the Natural Causes of the Alterations in the Air, they are under a particular Influence and Direction of Providence. Bp. Burnet on Arti. c. 1. Such an Impression on Men's Minds of God's Dominion over them, seems but necessary to support Mens Trust in God under the Disorders and Terrors of the unruly Meteors; therefore they are said to fulfil his Word, The Fire, and Hail, Snow, and Vapour, and Stormy Wind fulfilling his Word, Ps. 148. 8. The Pagan Mariners in Jonah, cried every Man to his God, when a mighty Tempest was in the Sea, John 1. 45.

* Ευσθίων δὲ μὲν ἔχοντες, καὶ ἀγνοοῦντες, ὡς ποιεῖται. Gale not. in Jamblic. Sec. V. c. 26.

The * Athenians had their three sorts of Prayers, with respect to the

the Winds. The *Heathen Poet* *Horace* was converted from Epicurism, by the Consideration of God's Power in the Turbulent Region. I need not add more, to shew that the stormy Weather was a Witness for God to the *Gentile World*, as well as fruitful Seasons, which the *Apostle* appeals to a Testimony of Divine Providence, allowed by the very *Heathen*.

T H E R E are those Expressions in Scripture that give God an Unrival'd Propriety in the Winds, *He bringeth forth the Winds out of his Treasures*, Jer. 10. 13. They are lock'd up from the Power of Mortals, they are not at the Dispose of the Enemy, who cannot throw Storms about them as fast as they do their ill Wishes against the Church; but they are reserv'd by God for his own peculiar Service.

H E maketh the Weight for the Winds, Job 28. 25. They are under a Divine Management, he appoints the Wind its Season, and Proportion, and Bounds, and for what Ends, whether for Mercy, or for Correction. Tho' unconstant, he makes them steddily Execute his Orders; tho' light of themselves, he enforces them with a Weight that throws down Houses, tears up Trees by the Roots, sinks the stately Ships, and shakes the Foundations of the Earth, Ps. 18. 7.

H E rides upon a Cherub, and flies upon the Wings of the Wind, Ps. 18. 10. He governs them as a Bird its own Wings, and by their rapid Motion dispatches the Errands of his Providence. He bridles them as the Rider his Horse, they are absolutely under the Check of his Hand, when they seem to be most unrein'd, and to own no Master.

T H E Lord hath his way in the Whirlwind, and in the Storm, Nah. 1. 3. Tho' dark, he sees his Path-way thro' them; tho' confus'd and disorderly, he produces Calm and Regular Effects by them. These are sometimes his Methods of Dealing with Men, his way of speaking to them, of calling them to their Prayers,

ers, of Correcting them for their Sins, and of teaching them Righteousness.

III. The third thing is to shew, why 'tis more eligible to fall into the Hand of God, than into the Hand of Man.

1. One Reason was more peculiar to *David*, and that was, he could more easily Fence against Man's Hand, than the People could. The whole strength of the Nation was devoted to the Security of his Sacred Person. Thousands were ready Sacrifices to preserve the Light of *Israel* from being quenched; he might have secur'd himself in some strong Fort, till the Sword of Man had finish'd its appointed Circuit. But he was too generous to be concern'd only for his own Safety, while he left his People to the Merciless Slaughters which he had deserv'd as well as they; he knew his own Sin, and not theirs, and therefore judg'd himself the Capital Offender: He look'd upon himself as much above them in *Guilt*, as he was in *Quality*; he proclaim'd his own *Guiltiness* and their *Innocence*, wept over his Sheep, so fatally misled by their own Shepherd, *2 Sam. 24. v. 17. Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly, but these Sheep, what have they done? Let thy Hand, I pray thee, be against me and against my Father's House.* Therefore he would not desire the Punishment that he could fly from; but as his People had sinn'd with him, he was willing to die with them. He chose a Calamity, which his own Person and Royal Family were equally expos'd to with the common People, he knew the Sword of the Lord could distinguish between the Righteous and the Wicked; the Guilty and the Innocent, between those that were fit to live, and those that were worthy to die. Thus this humble Soul submitted to a common Level with the meanest of his Subjects.

2. To fall into the Hands of Man, is more dishonourable to God and Religion. The Insults of the Wicked have always been provoking to Heaven, and intolerable to good People, *Deut. 32. 26, 27. God would have scattered abroad Jeshurun into corners, he would have made the remembrance of them to cease*

cease from among Men, but that he feared the Wrath of the Enemy, lest their Adversaries should behave themselves strangely, lest they should say our Hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this. Both Sacred and Profane History do tell, what ill use they have made of their Successes against the Church; sometimes they have despis'd the Power of God, and hung the Glory of all, at their Triumphal Chariot-wheels; sometimes they have reproach'd his People, as deluding themselves, and as forsaken of God; and have derided their trust in him, as a vain thing. That reproachful Challenge drew Tears from the Pious Psalmist, while they continually said unto him, *where is thy God?* Ps. 42. 3. They interpret their Victory as a Divine Patronage of their Cause, and Entitle Heaven to their Ambitious Designs and Oppressions.

N O W what honest Souls would not be afflicted, when their only Refuge is belied; when the Name of God is blasphemed, when the true Religion is expos'd to Contempt, and Righteous Providence made the Abettor of their Crimes? Thus the Redeemer would be a greater sufferer in his Interest, than we who are the Offenders, and our just Punishment would be a prejudice to the best Cause in the World. The Emperor *Maximinus* boasted of their flourishing State as the Reward of their Cruelty against the Christians. And a certain Prince has been flatter'd into the Belief that he has snatch'd Immortal Lawrels from all the Princes of *Europe* by his unrival'd Zeal in Persecuting his Protestant Subjects. Who would not then deprecate a Dispensation that would over-spread the Land with Spiritual Judgments, that would benight Men's Minds with Errors and Superstitions, and bring a greater Destruction upon their Souls, then upon their Bodies and Estates?

3. THE Hand of God is the most proper to bring Offenders to Repentance, when we see that we have Men like ourselves to deal with, we prepare to make Resistance, and oppose

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Force

* Vid. Euseb. Lib. 9.
Avrygabov *Epulmarias*
 & *Maximianus*, &c.

Force to Force. When Man is the Instrument, we are apt to disregard the first Cause, fall to our Arms rather than to our Prayers. We Meditate a Self-defence, hope to over-match the Enemy, or some way to escape his Fury; or we grow enraged by Blows, and resolve not to be cheap Victims; but to purchase Victory, or a glorious Death with the Blood of the Enemy: But when we fall into the Hand of God, what is there for us to do, but to fall down at his Feet? What Weapons have we to meet an offended God with, but Prayers and Tears? Whoever strove with his Maker at any other, and prosper'd, he's an Enemy to be petition'd, not to be contended with. When his Hand is against us, it disarms us, and leaves us neither Power nor Counsel; nothing but Pleas for Mercy.

WHEN Men are Agents in our Calamities, we are apt to lay all the blame on their Malice, and not regard God's Displeasure, nor our own Sins in them: But when God writes terrible things against us with his own Hand, we have none to accuse but our selves, and must look for the Cause at home; why he contends with us, who afflicts not willingly the Children of Men, *Lam. 3. 33.*

ALL Mankind have those Notions of the Supreme Being, that he will not be angry without a Cause; therefore the visible Marks of God's Anger do strike a Natural Conscience. The Light of Nature apprehended Heavens Fury under Publick Judgments, and the first thing it dispos'd them to, was to contrive Methods of appeasing it. When we are in the powerful Hand that besets us above and below, on every side, if we resist we perish, if we yield we may live. When Storms are order'd by Heaven to stop Sinners that are running from their Duty, there is no way to procure a Calm but to throw our *Jonahs* over-board.

SCRIPTURE, which gives us the best Account of God's Castigatory Visitations, calls them his Voice, whereby he would teach the World Righteousness, *Isaiah 26. 9.* And reckons the rough Wind one of his ways, wherein he will debate

bate with those sturdy Sinners, that would not be reclaim'd by the sweet and still Voice of his word. He fans the Nation, to *purge the Iniquity of Jacob, and to take away the Fruit of his Sin.* Cap. 27. 7, 8. This is the expected Issue of such a Dispensation. Cap. 26. 16. *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they pour'd out a Prayer when thy Chastening was upon them.* And in Hof. 5. 1. *I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their Offence, and seek my Face: In their Affliction they will seek me early.* Some Men's Religion begins not till they are at their wits-end, and will not be sober till they be made to reel to and fro in a Storm, and to stagger like a drunken Man. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, Ps. 107. 27, 28. When our Shores were cover'd thick with Wrecks, and the Streets fill'd with Rubbish, we could not fight with the Stormy Winds; we had none to do with, but that God, whose Commands they obeyed; and guilty, we cannot treat with him, but with Self-judging, contrite Hearts, and penitential Cries for Compassion thro' the Mediation of Jesus Christ. This then was the likeliest way to distress us into a Reformation, which was the thing we needed and God designed.

4. *HIS Mercies are great.* This is the Reason exprest in the Text, why David made this choice. While he submitted to his Justice, he would not despair of his Mercy; tho' God was angry, yet he knew him to be merciful under the severest Strokes; this left room for Prayers and Hope. The Consideration of this Propitious Attribute determin'd David in this great strait; had it not been for this, it would have been much more eligible to fall into the Hands of Mortals, than into the Hand of a God without Mercy; thus the Apostle represents him, when he said, 'tis a fearful thing to fall into the Hands of the living God, Heb. 10. 31.

THE RE can never want Force in this Royal Argument, to determine us in the like case, as will appear, if we open it in a few Particulars.

HIS Mercies are great. Therefore he is reconcileable. Tho' he be now our Enemy, he may be made our Friend again, tho' angry, he may be addrest unto. When he is marching against us, we may meet him with our Petitions for Peace. *David* had to deal with Men, whom he could expect no Favour from; they were his implacable Foes *by Principle*, for they were impure Idolaters, and hated *Israel's* Holy Religion, *by Interest*, for *Israel's* Overthrow would have made them more room in their Native Soil, and have let 'em into the ancient Possession of their fore-fathers; *by Revenge*, for they were a conquer'd People, and had their Resentments rais'd to the highest pitch, by the Spoils and Wast that *David* and his Men were often making: Must not we then own the Mercies of God are great to us, that when he had so much Reason to Chastise us, he did not put us into the Hands of those who could not be favourable to us, except they abandon'd their Religion, Interest, and Revenge all at once: Happy we that have to do with a God that may be pleas'd! He will hear of a Treaty with returning Sinners. The destroying Angel was made to stop his Hand at a relenting Cry, *v. 10*, with *v. 16*. In the blustering Storms that turn Men's Houses into *Babels*, wherein the Inhabitants are deaf to one another's Cries; Mercy hears, and is accessible to the humble and broken Prayers that are then offered up.

HIS Mercies are great. Therefore they will incline him to afflict in Measure. Mercy will consider what we can bear, while Justice looks at what we deserve. When Satan had left *Job* neither Child nor Estate, yet he felt his Malice stinted, and solicited God for more Power, *Cap. 2. 6*. His Instruments know no Bounds, but what a good God is pleas'd to confine them too. If their Commission was as extended as their ill-will, what lavish would they make of the Blood of the Righteous? When falling before the Enemy was propos'd to *David*, the space of three Months was to determine their Victories; but if in all that time God's Superintendency had not laid other Restraints on

on their conquering Sword, their three Months Slaughters would have been without number, and without distinction; but tho' we had sinned without Measure, yet in Measure God will debate with us, *Isai. 27. 8.* The Executions which Mercy does not prevent, it limits as to Time and Degrees; *For the Lord will not cast off for ever; but tho' he cause Grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his Mercies; Lam. 3. 31, 32.* A gracious Father will no more afflict his Children above their Strength, than above their Demerit. *For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: For the Spirit should fail before me, and the Souls which I have made, Isai. 57. 16.* God who is faithful will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, *1 Cor. 10. 13.*

H I S Mercies are great. Therefore he has Goodness to temper his Justice; that under the same severe Dispensation we may see God merciful as well as just; compassionate as well as angry. In the late awful Storm, some were surpriz'd by Death, and more were as surprizingly saved. The Triumphs of Mercy were more conspicuous and wonderful, then the Slaughters of Justice. He did fly upon the Wings of the Wind to rescue, as well as to destroy. *In the midst of Judgment he remembered Mercy.* How much better then is it to fall into his Hands, than into theirs whose very Mercies are Cruelty.

H I S Mercies are great. And therefore he will not utterly destroy, tho' he severely chastise us. The Enemies Design would have been to ruine, but God's was only to reform us. He stopt Vengeance in its full Career, and said to the Winds, thus far shall ye go, and no further, where all deserv'd to die, the Intercessions of Mercy are more remarkable. We must acknowledge with the Church, *'tis of his Mercies we are not consumed, because his Compassions fail not, Lam. 3. 22.* And with our Gracious Queen Anne in Her Pious Proclamation, yet it was the infinite Mercy of God, that Her Majesty and her People were not wholly destroy'd.

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HIS Mercies are great. Therefore we may trust our All in his Hands, here we may have a Sanctuary to retreat into, when we are neither safe by Sea nor Land; when our Wooden and Stone-walls are batter'd down by the Artillery of Heaven; when our Houses threaten to Entomb us and the trembling Earth to swallow us up, we may shelter our selves under the Wings of his Mercy. *God is our Refuge and Strength, and a very present help in Trouble, therefore will not we fear, tho' the Earth be remov'd, and tho' the Mountains be carried into the midst of the Sea, tho' the Waters thereof roar and be troubled,* Ps. 46. 1, 2, 3. Will Merciful Arms destroy? Will they let those drop that fly into their Inclosure? Will they confute the Hopes of distressed Penitents? And deny them a Refuge, who are pursu'd by the Judgments of God, and their own Guilt, and have no where to fly, but to infinite Mercy?

HIS Mercies are great. Now Mercy is a tender Attribute, and our Calamities may move his Pity. While the Rod is in his Hand, Mercy may be our Advocate in his Bosom. The kind Reluctancy in the Divine Breast, we may read in his Carriage to Ephraim, *How shall I give thee up Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turn'd within me; my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God, and not Man, &c.* Hos. 11. 8, 9. Our Miseries bespeak his Bowels, as our Guilt provokes his Wrath, which can want no Arguments from us, to destroy; and while there is Mercy in God's Nature, he cannot want a Motive to save. The Unworthiness that discourages us, is often the occasion, this glorious Perfection takes to display it self.

HIS Mercies are great. Therefore we may hope that he will repair our Ruines. If our Judgments should leave us nothing but our Lives, we may be suppli'd out of his inexhaustible Fund. Certainly 'tis best to fall into his Hand, who can heal the Wounds he makes, and wants not Goodness to incline him to it. His Heart may so relent, as to dry up our former Tears,
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by the same *Hand* that drew them from us. He who is rich in Mercy, may make us glad according to the days wherein he has afflicted us, Ps. 90. 15.

B U T if our very Lives must go for our Sins, that which is the most supporting Consideration of all, is, that he has Mercy to pardon our Guilt, and save our Souls. 'Tis Mercy that builds the fiery Chariot to refine us for a speedy Translation; that raises the Whirlwind to winnow away our Chaff, that we may be fit to be gather'd into Heaven's Garner. Mercy may admit of a Plea for *Eternal* Life, when all our Petitions for a *Temporal* are rejected. The Names that a sudden Stroke enters among the *Dead-list*, may be found written in the *Book of Life*. Tho' the Judgments of God may *confound* the Righteous and Wicked in the same visible Exit, yet their dislodged Souls will soon be *distinguish'd*. Mercy will know its own, and will one day give their Bodies a glorious Resurrection out of the common Rubbish.

I N short, it commends the kind Providence, that under such just Occasions of resenting our Unwillingness to be Reformed, made *David's* choice for us, and put us into the Hands of one, whose Mercies are greater then our Provocations, and who has furnish'd penitent Believers with the Pleas from his Sons plenary Satisfaction, which are more powerful to procure Blessings, than our Crimes can be to draw God's Displeasure. I should now shew, that yet it is a sad thing to fall into God's Hand, but what I shall say of this, I refer to the Application, which I now come to, and where I shall wave the Doctrinal Inferences, to leave room for more Practical Reflections, agreeable to the Text, or the Occasion.

I. T H O' it be more eligible to fall into the Hand of God, than of Man, yet it is Matter of Humiliation, that we have brought our selves under the Necessity of falling even into the Hand of God; that that Hand which the other Year appear'd so graciously for us; that that Hand which lately bath'd its Sword in the Blood of our Enemies should now stain it in ours.

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The Year before had a *Triumphant Exit*, but the last a very *Tragical one*. We have now been forced to put off the *Ornaments*, which the former Year Rob'd us with, and this Year, *alass!* commences in *Sackcloth and Tears*.

H O W horrid are these *Impieties*, that have thus chang'd the Scene with us? How can we forbear reproaching ourselves, that have thus diserv'd our own Interest, and provok'd our ancient and only Deliverer to turn our Destroyer? What a melancholly aspect is this upon us? Heaven is angry, and are we not troubled? *Was the Lord displeased against the Rivers?* *Was his Wrath against the Sea?* Hab. 3. 8. Was his Anger against the Wind? Was his Displeasure against our Houses? No, 'twas we that he was angry at.

I F we may judge of the rest of the Nation by our selves, can we wonder, if the Measure of our Iniquity had left no more room for Divine Forbearance? Must we not this day sigh out with the Prophet; *ah sinful Nation, a People laden with Iniquity, a Seed of Evil-doers, Children that are Corrupters, that have forsaken the Lord, and have provoked the Holy one of Israel to anger!* Isa. 1. 4. Must we not blush and be ashamed to lift up our face to God, for our Iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespasses are grown up unto the heavens, Ezra 9. 6. From whence we have been answer'd by terrible things in the late Storm. This was but the rebound of our own Wickedness. When the Light of the Gospel, and God's manifold Mercies to this Nation, did not check our ascending Impieties, no wonder if such Exhalations produced such a Tempest. O Lord, thou art just in all that is brought upon us, for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly, Neh. 9. 33. We should now afflict our Souls: for to bow down the head like a Bulrush, to spread Sack-cloth and Ashes under us, is not the Fast that God has chosen. We should now give our Sins their just Aggravations, and confess them with those afflictive Passions, as Godly Sorrow, bitter Remorse, Self-abhorrence, and Confusion of Face; that may give us a painful Sense of them, and make

us, as unwilling to relapse into our former Follies, as we would be to return to the greatest Affliction.

II. When we do fall into God's Hand, we should have awful Apprehensions of his Greatness. Who can avoid the Conviction of a Deity, when Elements do sometime step out of their ordinary Course to serve the Ends of Government in punishing great Sinners? Who can neglect him wsth hopes of Impunity? Who is so terrible in Majesty, so irresistible in Power? He scatters Terrors round him, when *he rides upon a Cherub, when he flies upon the Wings of the Wind*, Ps. 18. 10. Can we be still immoveably settled on our Lees, when the Earth trembles, when our Churches and Houses totter? If *the Foundation of the Hills* shake because of his Wrath, shall not we that kindled it be driven off our Sandy Foundations, and fly to the Rock of Ages? When God spake to Job out of the Whirlwind, it struck him into the profoundest Reverence, and Submissions: And can we be Irreligious and Fearless, when the Winds make us feel *the Power of his Anger*, when our falling Houses tell us, that there is no Safety against his Angry Blast. Should we not dread to offend him, who has *Treasures of Wrath*, both above and below to spend upon his Enemies? Who shall not fear thee thou King of Saints, whose Sovereignty is so universal, whose Justice is so inflexible, and whose Power so uncontroulable.

III. W E should also have an humbling Sense of our own Weakness, who are forsaken of our selves, and of all other Creatures, when God appears against us. Our Wisdom cannot then direct us how to fly from his Hand, nor all our Strength defend us; Feathery Creatures we are, *lighter than Vainity*, what can bear us up against the Blast of the Breath of his Nostrils? Ps. 18. 15.

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THOSE Ships of War that dar'd the *French*, that Insulted their Coasts; those Experien'd Pilots, who had so oft triumph'd over † *Michaelmas-flowers*; who had but lately made the Sea their Rendezvous of Victory, they sunk down at the awful Appearance, when an angry

† See Dr. Hammond, and Dr. Whitby, in Acts 27.

God made *the dark Waters his Pavilion round about him*, v. 11. The Earth forgot its Firmness, when it melted at the Smoke of his Presence, *Pf. 104. 32. Pf. 144. 5.* Houses reel'd and stagger'd, as well as Ships; and when the *Channels of Waters are seen, and the Foundations of the World are discover'd*, 'tis an instructive Discovery of the Vanity of all Creatures, and a terrible Rebuke to our Carnal Confidences, *Pf. 18. 15.* This Conviction of our Feebleness on every side should cure our Obstinacy, and dash our sinful Weapons out of our Hands. Dare we enter the Lists with the Almighty? Have we an Arm like his, who holds the *Sea in the hollow of his Hand, and gathers the Wind in his Fist*? Is it not Childish Folly to build a House of Cards against an Hurricane? Is it not fool Hardiness to throw our selves upon the *thick Bosses of his Buckler*? *Is there any number of his Armies? What then is Man that is a Worm, and the Son of Man which is a Worm?* Job 25. 3, 6.

IV. IF it be better to fall into the Hand of God, then of Man, then we should judge charitably of them that do so. Some lost their Lives, others are broken in their Estates by the late Storm. It is very unjust to make any suffer in their Reputations by God's Dispensations towards them. They should not lose their Credit with us, who notwithstanding their Sufferings, may still be the Favourites of Heaven. In Famine, Languishing Nature feels it self dying, and frets in lingering Pains, that it cannot die so soon as it would; Pestilence is a sudden, noisome, and reproachful way of dying; yet either of these was submitted to by a Holy David, because they were the

the Hand of God : And so was the late Storm, that so many suffer'd by. Therefore if the general Course of Man's Life speak well of him, it may reasonably continue our good Opinion of him under a sudden turn of Providence that lays him low.

AND as it is unjust, so it would be foolish too ; for suppose a Man should not be mistaken in his Censure, as these Sufferings are no certain Measures to go by, he's only right by chance, not by a discerning Judgment, and so it can be no Point of Wisdom in him.

IT is no less against Scripture, which lets us understand that changable Providence is no establish'd Rule to judge on what Terms any Man's Soul stands with God, *Eccl. 9. 1, 2, No Man knoweth either Love or Hatred by all that is before him, all things come alike to all : There is one Event to the Righteous, and to the Wicked.* And as our State in this World is but probational, it is necessary that the present Administration of things should be undistinguishing,

BESIDES, if we consider what is God's Design in National Judgments, that it is to awaken and reform a slumbering guilty Nation, that it is to reduce the Degenerate to a Sense of Religion, and to give a new Force to that old Impression upon Mankind, *that there is a God that Judges in the Earth,* we shall see that not to exempt the Religious, is promotive of such Holy Ends. There is enough in the most Righteous to justify God's Severities with them in this World, and to see him severely punishing Sin in them, whom every one must take to be of the best sort ; this will more deeply impress the Conscience with the Religious Dread of his strict Justice, and of his infinite Hatred to Sin, wherever he beholds it. What considering Person must not in this Case make the same Inference with the

Holy Apostle, if Judgment begin at the House of God, what shall be the end of them that obey not the Gospel: 1 Pet. 4. 17.

'TIS perverse if we divert from what the late Disaster speaks to our selves only, that we may be at more leisure to make an ill use of it in judging others, as if they were more worthy of Death than we: We should rather think, that it may be, they were fitter for a sudden Stroke, and might be Warnings to others at the cheapest Expence to themselves. 'Tis a kindness to the unready, if they are spar'd to be awaken'd by God's Judgments upon the Righteous, who were soon out of the Storm. It looks more like a Fatherly Chastisement, when the loss is only theirs, that Survive: Indeed none can be unconcern'd Spectators at the Wrath, when Sinners are cut off in their Wickedness, and increase the number of lost Souls; it is a most frightful Dispensation, that instructs and warns us at the cost of another's Eternal Happiness.

SUDDEN Death is no diskindness to those that are in a Posture for it; it leaves no place for Agonies of Nature, for the groundless Scruples of Conscience, or for Satan's Accusations to interrupt their resigning Spirits. The Amazement and Distraction of the Hurricane only befall them that escaped, the whole Tragedy was open to them, and shook all the Powers of their Souls, when a very transient Scene remov'd the other almost as soon, as it appear'd. The more violent the Tempest was, the sooner would they be wafted over to the Shores of everlasting Rest. And how enhancing would the Surprise be to find themselves in their Father's House, happily prevented of all their Fears on their Removal from their Houses of Clay; while they had left behind them many distracted Mortals, that were running too and fro, and knew not where to House themselves, dying many times over in their Conternations, when
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God persecuted them with his Tempest, and made them afraid with his Storm, both by Sea and Land; in their Houses and pleasant Walks.

SUCH Considerations as these may call off our severe Thoughts from others, and turn them more justly upon our selves, to whom these Judgments of God are premonitory Signs; and there cannot be a more mortal Symptom than this, when Men will not consider these Works of God, and such Tremendous Operations of his Hands. Our Saviour reproves the Temper that Censures others, while we, think our selves unconcern'd, shewing us what use we should make of such Dispensations to our selves. *Those eighteen upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were Sinners above all Men, that dwelt in Jerusalem, I tell you, nay, but except ye repent, ye shall likewise perish.* Luke 13. 4, 5. We should then so improve such Visitations, that when others are gone to Heaven in a Storm, we may not go down in our Calm to an infernal Tempest.

5. WE should be thankful to God, that we in these parts have yet escaped this Hand of God. We should never loose a grateful Sense of our Preservation, that the Winds did but rock us a sleep, which buried others alive, that the Agitation, which stop'd the Vital Breath of others, did but make the Air more Healthful for us to breath in. It was distinguishing Goodness that consulted our *unfitness* for a sudden Death, and not our *desert* of it, when others it may be were snatch'd away, not so much because they deserv'd it; but because their dying in such a terrible manner would be least prejudicial to themselves, and most awakning to others. Every one might read Tokens of God's Anger in such Victims; therefore we that are still the *Monuments of his Patience*, should be inscrib'd with Characters of Praise to our never slumbering Watchman. Such Indulgencies, if Providence should charm our Affections, should ex-
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tinguish all Disingenuity in our Tempers, and make us more chearful, and resolved in all our Obedience to him.

IF we consider, that we were in the Power of one, whom we had most offended, who had the greatest Reason to be severe with us; who had an Eye to see all our Sins, Holiness to Resent them, and an Arm to punish them; and who had no need of our Service, we must then own that it was great Mercy indeed for him to spare us. If we read the Relation of the late Disaster, and where others write a *Calamity*, we may write a *Mercy*: And should not this oblige us to express our Gratitude in all the ways that God calls us to do it?

6. THIS Providence calls us to prepare for sudden Death. We know not when and where we may meet it. The Sense we have of our own Mortality, and the daily Instances of the Uncertainty of Humane Life, make the Delays of Repentance inexcusable. When the World was but in its Infancy, it was not too young to be season'd with the Thoughts of the coming of the Lord: When *Enoch* but the seventh from *Adam*, Preach'd this Doctrine to it *Jude, v. 14*. Early Impressions of Death and Judgment, are a necessary part of that Religion, which young Persons should set forth in the World with. We may see the common Course of things writing Death upon every Age of Man, even those that are most likely to spin out Life to the end of the Thread, have their Months cut off in the midst. Many die in their full Strength, being wholly at ease and quiet, when their Breasts are full of Milk, and their Bones are moistned with Marrow, *Job 21. 21, 23, 24*. They that put Death farthest from them are sporting even on the sides of the Pit; they spend their Days in Mirth and in a moment go down to the Grave, *v. 13*.

BUT

BUT we have so many standing Premonitions in the Sacred Scriptures of Man's uncertain and sudden removal hence; and we have seen so many Examples thereof in Divine Providence, that one would think we should not need to see the Death of one Person more to awaken us to prepare for our own. If it were possible for one so perfectly to understand the Mechanism of his own Body, that he could know just how many Years that natural Clock would be a running down, yet he could not secure it against Impressions from without. This Region of Changes is parturient of those strange Accidents, which no Man can foresee or prevent. *We know not what a Day or Night may bring forth*, Prov. 27. 1. Even those that most expect Death, may find somewhat surprizing in the particular time and manner of it. Which of them that perished in the late Hurricane, could think that they should have their Exit in a Storm; that they should be twice buried, first in the Rubbish of their own Houses, and then digg'd out of those Graves for the Solemnity of a decent Funeral?

THEREFORE if we procrastinate our Repentance, in hopes of more Warnings, then we have already had, it will be extraordinary Goodness, and such as we cannot reasonably expect, if God prevents such an horrible Surprize as that threatened by the Holy Apostle, *when they shall say Peace and Safety, then sudden Destruction cometh upon them, as Travail upon a Woman with Child*, 1 Thes. 5. 3.

IF the Considerations before us have not their due Influence, Lord! when shall we say that Heaven has done enough to awaken us to follow our Blessed Saviour's Advice, *Take ye heed, watch and pray, lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping*, Mark 13. 33, 36.

VII. 'TIS also a loud Warning to those Families that call not upon God's Name. If we are to pray every where, lifting up Holy Hands, then surely we must do it in our Families and Closets, where we are no more safe than abroad, without Divine Protection. We may justly find a *Sepulchre* where God is deny'd his *Altar*. And it will be no wonder, if God make our Houses our Burying-places, where we have buried so many of his Mercies in ungrateful Neglects.

*Secretum divinis ullum esse putas? veri ut taceant, in-
munda loquuntur. Oremus so-
les & marmora. — Juv. Sat.
IX.*

The Stones of the House may cry out against the Prayerless Inhabitants. God can make those Mutes, *the Stone out of the Wall, and the Beam out of the Timber*, to proclaim their Guilt,

and God's Anger, by falling upon their Heads, *Hab. 2. 11*. The Heathen World understood somewhat of this inarticulate Language, when the Satyrists brings in the Beasts, as telling their Masters Secrets. We should learn then to make the place of our Abode, as it were the witness of our Devotions; We should make it our constant Duty to pray together with our Families, seeing we may on a sudden be all buried alive together in one common Grave.

N O Man that has any sense of Religion, but would close his Life with solemn Prayer, and then he must perform this Duty every Evening; for he knows not but he may be in another World before next Morning. All the pleasant Senses of the Day may Epilogue in a Stormy Night. The King of Terrors may Arrest us in his Anti-chambers, and make them an immediate Passage into our eternal Abodes. We should then conclude every Day with serious and fervent Prayer, for tho' we may go to our Beds in a Calm, yet a *Tempest may steal us away in the Night*, Job 27. 20.

LASTLY,

LASTLY, To conclude, We should do what we can by a sincere and speedy Reformation, to stop the further spreading of his Judgments. Why should we think that all the Effects of his Anger are over, when the provoking Cause still continues, and must receive greater Aggravation by our Impenitency after such an Example of his Wrath. The Trepidation of the Earth in some other parts of the Nation may, for any thing we know, be a Prefage, that an offended Majesty has not yet done with us, but has prepared second Causes to do more Executions, if we continue yet unreformed.

Viz. THE Continuator of Ezechard's Roman History, takes notice, That during Procopius his Usurpation, there hap- pen'd a violent Storm of Thunder and Lightning, which was at- tended with so dreadful a Motion of the Earth, that the Sea de- serted its ancient Bounds, and the Ships under Sail were left, as it were on dry Ground, till on a sudden the Sea disdaining a Re- pulse, return'd with redoubled Fury, and bounding over its former Limits, broke with irresistible Rage over Islands into the Continent, where it bore down all before it, private Habitations, publick Buildings, Men and Beasts, and that no less than 5000 were said to have perished on this Occasion some of the Ships were by the Violence of the Winds born up on the tops of Houses; as it hap- pen'd at Alexandria, and some at two Miles distance from the Shore; as Ammianus says, he saw one himself near Methone, a Town in Laconia. These Prodigies Ammianus seems to relate, as if they portended Procopius his Rebellion, tho' (says the Polite Continuator) they ought rather to be consider'd as an Introduction to that fatal Inundation of the Northern Nations, which happen'd not long after, and the total Ruine of the Western Provinces. God grant that the late dreadful Tempest may not be a prodromus to further Judgments, but a stop to further Provocation.

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T H E Righteous God might have begun at this end of the Nation, and made us the Tragical Theatre to others, that they have been to us. But if such Goodness as this does not make us relent into an ingenuous Repentance, there may be still somewhat left in the late Dispensation to keep up a Religious Fear; that if we go on to Sin, God will go on to punish. Some tender Intervals of Forbearance, that are usual between one step and another, should not take of all Fear of a greater Woe that may be to come.

T H A T there are vast Preparations in the Bowels of the Earth to castigate hardened Sinners, we have Modern Proofs from the terrible Earthquakes, that have made great Desolations in other parts of the World. 'Tis needless to enter into a Disquisition, whether the Force of that Subterraneous Matter be not spent, seeing God has still his hidden Treasures below us, besides those over our Heads, viz. Of Snow, Hail, Rain and WINDS, &c.

I F the Heathens had seen what had happen'd to us in this Nation, would they not have been before us in reforming? The Mariners after the Storm was over, *feared the Lord exceedingly, and offer'd a Sacrifice unto the Lord, and made Vows*, Jon. 1. 16. *Nineveh* was Preach'd into a Reformation by a Prophet, that was lately come out of the *Whales Belly*: We are now Preach'd to by those that are gone down into the Heart of the Earth, from whence they shall never return. O that we would cry mightily to God, and so enforce our Cries by returning every one from his evil way, that our Reformation may be more sincere than theirs was, and the Blessings of it more lasting to us. *We should now break off our Sins by Righteousness, and do Justice, and love Mercy, and walk humbly with our God.* We should now adorn our Holy Profession, by abound-
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ing in all the Fruits of Righteousness. Those *new Judgments* which no Man living ever saw before in this Nation, should excite us all to resolve on a Life of *new Obedience*. Our Fast-day should produce a *Mortification of Vice*, and give a new *Life to Virtue*. Alas that Religion should be so sunk in our Nation, as to need so many *Deaths* to give it a *Resurrection*.

BUT if after our Fast, we should imitate so ill a Pattern as that of the *Jews*, and *make our Hearts as an Adamant Stone*, lest we should hear the *Law and the Words which the Lord sent in his Spirit by his Prophets*, what can we expect but their Judgments. Therefore came a great *Wrath* from the *Lord of Hosts*, that scatter'd them with a *Whirl-wind* among all the *Nations*, and made their *Land desolate*, *Zech. 7. 12, 14.*

ON the other hand, we want not Arguments to encourage our return to God; when this very Providence furnishes us with them. That the Storm was not universal, that the Rod was but shaken in some Places, where it might have been laid on with an heavy Hand, seems to bespeak the Penitent with Reserves of Mercy, and such have many Promises and Examples in his Word to support their Faith. *Let us then return to the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us, he hath smitten, and he will bind us up, Hos. 6. 1.* Let us be sober and circumspect, and *pass the time of our sojourning here in fear*. But if a *Noah*, a *Job*, a *Daniel* cannot keep off publick Judgments, then with *David's* Contrite, Resigning Spirit, we should say, *Let us fall into the Hand of the Lord (for his Mercies are great) and let us not fall into the Hand of Man.*

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